



News Release

Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region External Affairs Office

**Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building, 1 Federal Drive, Ft. Snelling, MN 55111-4056
612/713-5360 Fax: 612/713-5280 <http://midwest.fws.gov>**

04-52

For Immediate Release

July 27, 2004

**Contacts: Vernon Tabor 785-539-3474 ext 110
Georgia Parham 812-334-4261, ext. 203**

Critical Habitat for the Topeka Shiner Designated in Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today designated 836 miles of stream in Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska as critical habitat for the endangered Topeka shiner.

Included in the designation for the Topeka Shiner are stream segments in the Raccoon River, Boone River, and Rock River watersheds in Iowa; the Big Sioux and Rock River watersheds in Minnesota; and the Elkhorn River watershed in Nebraska. Almost all of the adjacent lands are in private ownership.

Areas designated as critical habitat for the Topeka shiner are occupied by the species or provide critical links between occupied habitats. Topeka shiner habitat in Kansas, Missouri, and South Dakota, as well as habitat on the Fort Riley Military Installation in Kansas, was excluded from the final designation.

“We originally considered critical habitat for the Topeka shiner in Kansas, Missouri, and South Dakota,” said Ralph Morgenweck, Regional Director of the Service’s Mountain Prairie Region. “Since that time, conservation plans for this species have been completed that we believe will address its conservation needs in these states.”

Lands in the States of Missouri, Kansas, and South Dakota were excluded from critical habitat designation because those states have management plans that provide comprehensive conservation measures and programs necessary to achieve recovery of the Topeka shiner. These state management plans were evaluated and satisfied the following three criteria: (1) they provide a conservation benefit to the species (i.e., the plans must maintain or provide for an increase in the species’ population or enhancement or restoration of its habitat within the area covered by the plan); (2) they provide assurances that they will be or will continue to be implemented; and (3) they provide assurances that they will be effective (i.e., the plans must identify biological goals, have provisions for reporting progress, and are of a duration sufficient to implement the actions and achieve the goals and objectives).

In addition, the Endangered Species Act requires the Service take into consideration the economic impact and any other relevant impacts when specifying any particular area as critical habitat. State programs in Missouri, Kansas, and South Dakota include conservation actions, such as partnerships with state agencies and private landowners that could be adversely impacted by the designation. The Service determined that the benefits of those actions to promote the conservation of the Topeka shiner and its habitat exceed the benefits that would be provided by designation.

The Fort Riley Military Installation in Kansas was excluded because it has an integrated natural resource management plan that provides adequate management and conservation benefit for the shiner.

The critical habitat rule is published in today's *Federal Register*. The rule, news release, and questions and answers, are available on the Service's web site at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/fish/shiner>

The Topeka shiner was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act on Dec. 15, 1998. This small, silvery minnow is 3 inches or less in length. It is found in small to mid-size prairie streams with relatively high water quality and cool-to-moderate temperatures. If this fish is to survive and flourish, the form and structure of the streams where it lives must be safeguarded, so that the habitat and the balance of fish species in these streams is not significantly altered. While the Topeka shiner can sometimes live in streams with degraded habitat conditions, its long-term survival in these streams is at risk.

Many of the streams where this species is found flow year round, although some become intermittent during summer or periods of prolonged drought. The Topeka shiner's historic range includes portions of Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota. The species continues to exist in these States, but in most areas its range is greatly reduced.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act. It identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands.

This critical habitat designation was completed in response to a lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most listed species, while preventing the Service from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Endangered Species Act including Habitat Conservation Plans,

Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for endangered species is provided on many national wildlife refuges, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife management areas.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies. For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visit our home page at <http://www.fws.gov>

- FWS -